



Attachment: March 26, 1997



United Way of America

Housing/Community Development Initiative

Suggestions for Building Relationships with your United Way

If you are seeking to develop a relationship with your local United Way, it is best to begin by setting up an informational meeting to explain your organization's mission, what needs you fulfill, and whom you serve in your community. At the same time, you can find out about the United Way, the array of resources (such as professional development, management assistance, funding, and volunteer recruitment) that many local United Ways have to assist nonprofit organizations and support requirements.

Meet with a number of United Way staff, including those in positions involved in community initiatives, community problem solving, planning, allocations, fund distribution, agency relations and/or community services. The name of the department varies for every United Way. Bring your annual report, brochure, and other pertinent information to the meeting.

Funding Cycles for Local United Ways

Most United Ways have an annual fundraising cycle for raising and distributing funds. Frequently the fundraising campaign is in the fall with funds being allocated in the winter or spring. Additionally, the funding priorities that drive allocations are usually set five to six months before the fundraising campaign kicks off. So it may take awhile for your organization to be considered, especially if housing is a new priority (or not a priority) for your United Way.

Member Agency Status

Member agency status is the most prevalent arrangement in which a United Way provides ongoing financial and technical assistance to a nonprofit organization. To be a member agency, a nonprofit generally must have a 501(c)3, a functioning board, a paid director, a budget, financial and programmatic accountability, fundraising plans, an office and a phone, and a 1-2 year track record of success. If your organization does not meet these criteria, the United Way may help you move toward these goals. Unfortunately, some United Ways have been unable to reach their fundraising goals in recent years, and have thus not been able to take new members.

Member agencies must abide by restrictions set by the local United Way. These restrictions are generally centered on the time of year that active fundraising can take place, and from whom funds can be sought.

Emerging Types of Relationships Between United Ways and Nonprofit Organizations

A number of United Ways are changing the way that they look at membership. Consequently several forms of affiliation are emerging for nonprofit organizations. Since each United Way is unique, the following list represents examples. Other forms of affiliation may exist in your community.

1. **Donor Choice/Affiliate Status:** Donors in many areas have expressed their desire to have more say in where their money goes. Therefore, they designate the organization(s) where they want their contributions to the United Way to go. Any 501(c)3 organization in a community is eligible to receive United Way funds through donor choice. The size of the United Way contribution is determined by the amount specified by the donors.
2. **Priority Grants:** A number of United Ways engage in extensive community needs assessments from which they identify a specific group of critical community needs. The identified community needs then becomes the basis from which the United Ways make multi-year funding decisions. For example, if a United Way identified permanent affordable housing as a critical need, they might establish three-year priority grants, given out on a competitive basis to nonprofit housing organizations.
3. **Venture or demonstration/development grant funding:** Organizations can often apply for a small grant to undertake a specific project. These grants enable the United Way to work with nonmember organizations, and are sometimes an entry point into more permanent funding.

Services Beyond Funding to Explore

Many United Ways provide support services to nonprofits in the community, regardless of whether an organization is a member of the United Way. In addition to, or instead of base funding, your organization may be eligible to partake in the services offered. Not every United Way offers all of these, but it is worth finding out:

1. **Formal and informal volunteer referral:** Many United Ways support community-wide volunteer recruitment campaigns, and refer interested volunteers to nonprofit organizations. This may be carried out by a Voluntary Action Center or Volunteer Center (the name varies), which is often a division or agency of United Way. By registering your organization with the center you may be able to get volunteers to serve on your board of directors or volunteers to assist with programmatic needs.
2. **Information and referral (I&R) services:** A housing organization can be listed in a United Way's hotline or I&R service so that people looking for affordable housing can be referred to your organization. Conversely, the I&R service may be useful to a housing organization that is trying to provide supportive services to tenants or potential homeowners by providing referrals to appropriate service providers.

3. **Training:** United Ways offer training to nonprofits on a variety of topics, including board development, long-range and strategic planning, fundraising, and budgeting, to name a few.
4. **Management Assistance Programs (MAP):** Loaned executives and specialists in such areas as accounting, planning, computer programming and personnel are often available to assist nonprofit organizations through a local United Way's Management Assistance Program. This program matches organizations that express a need in a particular area with a volunteer who has the needed expertise.
5. **Linkages to other organizations:** United Ways encourage the full utilization and integration of agency services within the community. For example, a United Way might link child care and transportation. Furthermore, United Ways sometimes broker services, which potentially could enhance your housing program's capacity to act.
6. **Executive Director coalitions:** In some communities, coalitions of Executive Directors of United Way organizations exist to provide opportunities to network, learn new skills and work together on issues that affect nonprofit organizations.
7. **In-kind services:** Such services might include printing, office space or administrative support.
8. **Gifts-in-Kind America:** Businesses donate such materials as computer hardware and software, books, vacuum cleaners, office supplies and furniture. Additionally, some local United Ways are also securing donated building supplies. The businesses often make the materials available to local United Ways and nonprofit organizations, for the cost of shipping. Make your wish list known to the United Way, in the event that these items become available.

Fostering a Reciprocal Relationship with your United Way

There is a trend among United Ways across the country to pursue diversity on their boards of governors as well as on the volunteer committees established by their boards. Many United Ways may need help finding appropriate community leaders to fill these spots. Your recommendations of volunteers to serve on United Way committees could be quite useful to your United Way and to strengthening your working relationship.

For more information or material on United Way's role in Housing & Community Development contact Eric Muschler at (703) 836-7112 ext. 538.

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